

What Helps

Educational Leadership recently sat down with high school students at the Howard Gardner School in Alexandria, Virginia, to ask them, *What should teachers know about students to help them learn? Here are some of the students' comments.*

Meet Us Face to Face

The most important thing a teacher can know about a student is how they learn and the way their mind works. Specifically, I need discussion. I can't just be another face. I know some kids prefer that facelessness—just do this worksheet, study this, they're good. That works for some kids, but I know it doesn't work for a majority. There are so many ways to learn.

—Colin Curry, grade 12



Get to Know Us

At this school, the small numbers [of students] really make such a difference, and the teachers being qualified makes a difference. At my old school, it was almost heartbreaking to know that you could come back in a year and the teacher wouldn't recognize your face; she wouldn't know your name. It was just not good for your mental health to think that you were just work to them. So it's really amazing to come here and have teachers who know me. They know how I learn. They know my personality. They are always recommending things I might like to do. It's just really nice to feel like I'm actually friends with my teachers and that they're on my level.

—Willow Collins, grade 12

Connect with Our Passions

Our entire class likes to skateboard, so our math class is building a half-pipe. We're still working on it right now, and we also filmed it. Everyone got into it, and it was a

really good class and helped us learn a lot. When you're building a half-pipe, everything has to be precise, and you have to do the math to figure out where you need to cut the wood or where you need to put the angles, and there's a lot of math in it. But since we wanted to build the half-pipe, it was a lot easier to do the math for it.

—Ben Jarvis, grade 10

Don't Bore Us

A teacher should get to know what students like so they can put it into the lesson and make it more interesting and not have kids dozing off during the day. You don't want to go in a boring class [just after] you've gotten up early and you just want to go to sleep. At least it'll keep it interesting, and you'll be learning and having fun at the same time.

—Wayne Lewis, grade 8



Make Sure We Understand

My 6th and 8th grade math teacher taught from a textbook; she'd expect us to read over the chapter, and instead of explaining how to do this math problem she'd just write it up on the board and then have us do practice questions around in a circle. I always felt like an idiot because it just didn't click without explaining it in several different mediums. So I always got in trouble in that class because I'd get distracted and doodle on my paper. I felt that I would have done better if she had asked, "Well, Molly, you don't seem to be understanding what's going on. What can I do to help you?"

—Molly Adler, grade 11



Let Us Choose How to Demonstrate Our Learning

The thing that really helps in this school is that in every class, if they give us a project they give us multiple ways that we can do the project. They don't just tell us, "Do a poster this size with however many colors to illustrate this and have these things on it." Last year I did an ecology project, and we had all these different things we could do.

Us Learn?

What I chose was an epic poem because I'm a writer. So I actually did an epic poem on the ecology of the Black Sea, and I got an A. It worked out fine. That was something that only one other student had ever done before, but it was the only one on the list that really worked for me.

—Haley Simpkins, grade 12

Just Talk to Us

In 8th grade, I was very bad at writing and my teacher didn't see that, so she didn't help me with it. Although I had great ideas, I couldn't get them down. Nobody really approached me with an alternative. Instead of scolding me, maybe she could have just talked to me.

—Rusty Brittingham, grade 10



**"I like to talk about things,
and that's how I learn."**

Honor Our Learning Preferences

Early this year, my English teacher realized that I'm not much of a talker during class, and when she would ask us to write essays about how we felt about something, I wasn't really comfortable doing that. So she changed my curriculum to cater to a more technical type of writing. So now I get to write research papers, and they're a lot easier for me to write.

—Katya Derzon, grade 10



Meet Us on Our Level

I feel that one of the most important things for teachers to know is how to interact with children on their level. So instead of writing a math problem on the board and going off on some random tangent about X—it's not even a

random tangent, because it's actual math terminology, except we don't *know* actual math terminology—my math teacher will make up a story about a Yeti who goes skiing. Something a little offbeat—and because it's so offbeat, that makes it easy to remember.

—Rose Peele, grade 11

Give Us the Time We Need

The most important thing the teacher should know about students is whether they learn fast or slow and whether they have to look at the material or they have more of an auditory learning style. Sometimes it's better to read the information out to the students than just to give them a sheet and say, "Read this over a couple times and then answer the questions."

—Jeremiah Long, grade 10



Make Learning Interactive

In my history class, there's a lot of joking around but still learning at the same time. I like to talk about things, and that's how I learn. We have a work packet we do every morning where the teacher will put up a picture on a screen that has to do with history, and we have to write what we think about it. And then we discuss it in class—what we think it is, and what we know about it, and stuff like that. It's pretty cool.

—Anna Marie Bull, grade 10



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